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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000415

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: HEAD OF STATE COMMITTEE FOR WORK WITH
RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE'S COMMENTS REGARDING THE ALLIANCE OF
CIVILIZATION CONFERENCE IN TURKEY AND CURRENT RELIGIOUS
ISSUES

Classified By: Political-Economic Section Rob Garverick for reasons 1.4
(b, d)

11. Summary: POLOFF met with Hidayat Orucov, head of the State Committee for Works with Religious Structures (SCWRS) in April to discuss his role in leading the Government of Azerbaijan (GOAJ) delegation to the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) event in Turkey on 06-07 April 2009. The primary purpose of the GOAJ delegation was to establish a dialogue of reciprocal relations with different cultural bodies and civilizations on the basis of mutual interest. Regarding Mr. Orucov's presence at the event, and not President Aliyev, Mr. Orucov did not comment on any possible political significance, stating only that he had been invited months before and was not aware of President Aliyev's schedule. Mr. Orucov also addressed Azerbaijan's new religious hotline, recently instituted to accept complaints of religious harassment; to Mr. Orucov's knowledge, there had not been any significant complaints since it had been instituted. Mr. Orucov requested the opportunity to have his staff review the upcoming Religious Freedom Report (RFR) before it was submitted, and he expressed an interest in visiting the U.S. in September 2009. End Summary.

Role at the AOC Conference

12. Mr. Orucov gave only a very general view of his impressions of the AOC, his goals, the delegations accomplishments, and the topics discussed. Mr. Orucov said that his purpose during the trip was to discuss the world's different cultures, civilizations and how they merge with and reflect each other; he also praised the efforts to tackle ethnic and cultural problems. He highlighted Azerbaijan as a melting pot of civilizations and cultures, and he mentioned the merging of cultures and the attempts to solve ethnic and cultural problems during the AOC were praiseworthy. Mr. Orucov said that the question of what kind of shape the battle against terrorism and against separatism should take was discussed during the conference, as well as the dynamic of national and cultural interest. Mr. Orucov did not provide any substantive achievements of his delegation, except to note that the GOAJ supports such events and participates with pleasure. Finally, Mr. Orucov noted that President Aliyev's daughter, Leyla Aliyeva, a member of the youth organization of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), was invited and was elected as a member of the youth organization of the U.N. President Aliyev's absence

13. Mr. Orucov did not comment on the possibility of his position at the head of the delegation, and not President

Aliyev, serving as a sign of protest in the midst of talks regarding possible Turkey-Armenian rapprochement. Mr. Orucov simply said that he had been invited long before and that he was not aware of President Aliyev's schedule. Citing the busy schedule of the conference, Mr. Orucov said that the current issues between Turkey and Armenia and Turkey and Azerbaijan were not discussed during the conference. Need to move to a "practical level"

¶4. Mr. Orucov made a comment, in the context of discussing the accomplishments of the delegation at the AOC, that it was necessary to move to a "practical level" to achieve "practical results" and that "ideas should be implemented." After being asked to clarify, Mr. Orucov gave a long winded diatribe about the cultural integrity of Azerbaijan and the continued violations of U.N. resolutions related to the return of refugees. Mr. Orucov cited the remarks of the President of Armenia during a visit to Iran, which indicated that Karabakh would never be returned to Azerbaijan (this was reported in the press on 16 April 2009). Mr. Orucov said that Russia, Iran, and some (unidentified) western countries were supporting Armenia. Quoting a remark from Ambassador Derse, Mr. Orucov said that Azerbaijan "should export tolerance along with oil and gas," thereby touting Azerbaijan's strong record of tolerance in this regard. In contrast to Azerbaijan's tolerance, Mr. Orucov alleged that Azerbaijani religious mosques and icons (to include Christian icons) were being destroyed (presumably in occupied territories) and "Grigorionized" for the Armenian Church. In response to how many icons have been disturbed, Mr. Orucov said he did not know the exact numbers but would find out and

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let us know. Mr. Orucov said that if more international attention was paid to issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Ossetia, such problems could be solved; after this resolution, it will be possible to speak more about the AOC. Hot Line

¶5. According to the SCWRS head of the press service, a hotline was launched, which works 24 hours a day and collects information regarding alleged religious harassment. Mr. Orucov said that the main goal was to receive information and solve problems quickly. There have not been any calls of significance since the hotline concept was launched, though he did say that there had been several calls otherwise. Mr. Orucov said that it was important to keep in touch with the different strata of society, and he underscored the SCWRS' efforts to quickly provide solutions to problems and keep a balance with religious freedom. Finally, he noted that the SCWRS has contact with people in even the most remote regions of Azerbaijan.

RFR

¶6. Mr. Orucov repeated his complaints regarding the previous RFR: information is published without proper basis, and the information is one-sided without the SCWRS' comments. He wanted to avoid the need to create a formal response to the upcoming RFR, which he has done in the past "without pleasure." Mr. Orucov asked for an opportunity to review the report. Embassy has since asked Mr. Orucov and other GOAJ officials for input on the 2009 report. VISIT TO WASHINGTON

¶7. While having been previously invited, Mr. Orucov's schedule has been such that he has not had the opportunity to visit the U.S. since attended a session of the U.N. approximately 18 months ago. At the suggestion of the Azerbaijani Ambassador to the U.S., Mr. Orucov hoped to visit the U.S. in September, 2009, with the intent of meeting representatives from Congress, NGOs, and DRL. DERSE